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Just a Sprig of Mountain Heather



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A SPRIG OF MOUNTAIN HEATHER

"Living flowers that skirt the eternal frost"

BEING A STORY OF THE
HEATHER AND SOME FACTS ABOUT
THE MOUNTAIN PLAYGROUNDS
OF THE DOMINION



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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OTTAWA

1914

A SPRIG OF MOUNTAIN HEATHER

FROM

THE CANADIAN NATIONAL PARKS

“THE top o’ the world to you” is an old greeting in Ireland, but this little sprig of Mountain Heather brings to you in very reality a bit of the top o’ the world. It comes from alpine meadows frequented by the wild goat and the ptarmigan, but known to few people other than those who seek solitude among the snowy summits of the National Parks of Canada.

It is just possible that some of you may not know that heather flourishes in Canada and yet there are lofty slopes and plateaus in the Rockies and the Selkirks generously carpeted with heather like the hills and moors of Scotland.

The heather in this booklet was gathered in Simpson Pass, in Rocky Mountains Park, from a sunny alpine garden, nearly a mile and a half above the sea. This gap through the mountains was named after Sir George Simpson, Governor in Chief of the Hudson Bay Company, who traversed it in 1841 in the course of his journey around the world. On reaching the Pass, the adventurous Scot was surprised and delighted to discover the Mountain Heather. In his “Narration of a Journey Around the World”, he tells the story thus:

“From the vicinity of perpetual snow we estimated the elevation of the height of land to be seven or eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, while the surrounding peaks appeared to rise nearly half of that altitude over our heads. . . . In addition to the physical magnificence of the scene, I here met an unexpected reminiscence of my own native hills in the shape of a plant which appeared to me to be the very heather of the Highlands of Scotland and I might well regard the reminiscence as unexpected inasmuch as in all my wanderings of more than twenty years, I had never found anything of the kind in North America. As I took a considerable degree of interest in the question of the supposed identity, I carried away two specimens, which, however, proved upon minute comparison to differ from the genuine staple of the brown heaths of the ‘land o’ cakes’.”

What emotions this discovery must have aroused in the Scottish hearts of the Simpson party as they struggled to find a way through the almost impenetrable wall of mountains!

The close resemblance of the Canadian plant to the Scottish Heather delights visitors who have known the latter in the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood". Dr. A. P. Coleman, Professor of Geology in the University of Toronto, writing in 1911 of his first visit to Laggan, in 1884, remarks: "Then came green timber and shade with moss underfoot, and a green-edged lake followed by a stiff climb among the dwindling spruces until timber line was reached, where my Scotch friend halted with a kindling eye. We were walking upon heather, five thousand miles from the Scottish moorlands, the first he had seen for years. I had not known before that heather grew in Canada so that it was an equal surprise to me. There were three kinds with red, yellowish or pure white blossoms, the last small bells almost as dainty as lily-of-the-valley; the broad spaces between the rocks were carpeted with them".

The red blossoms which Professor Coleman refers to were without doubt, the Red Mountain Heather, the yellowish ones the White Mountain Heather, and the pure white, the White Heath (*Cassiope Mertensiana* Bong. Don).

Near Relations

The Red Mountain Heather of the Rockies, although not identical with the European species, is a very close relative. In the British Isles there are two genera of plants called heather—the one known as Scotch Heather or Ling, the other as Fine-Leaved Heather or Heath. The Canadian plant more closely resembles the latter, as the leaves of these two are more nearly of the same length and shape, and the flowers are rather bell-shaped and hang at or near the ends of the branches. The Scotch Heather has very minute leaves, imbricated on the stem and purplish lilac coloured flowers which hang along one side of the uppermost portion of the stem.

Mountain Heather

Three well defined species of the Mountain Heather have been described by botanists: one with rose-red flowers,

one with flowers of creamy white and one with flowers of a pink or purplish colour with yew-like leaves. Only the two first have been found in the Rockies. There is, however, a plant intermediate between the white and the red which is considered to be a hybrid, from the fact that individuals have been collected which show a gradation of form and colour from the red to the white species. These two species, the red and the white—are confined to the mountains of western North America from Wyoming to Alaska. The species with purplish flowers and yew-like leaves is found on the higher mountains of Maine and New Hampshire; on Mount Albert, Quebec; in Labrador, and through Arctic America to Alaska.

Scotch Heather

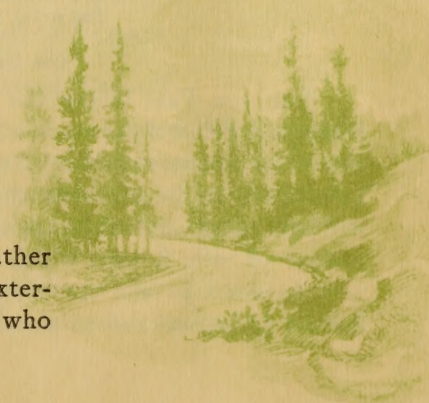
No people ever loved a flower as the Highlander loves his heather. He honors the thistle as the emblem of Scotland; but the heather warms his heart. With its garlands he has crowned his heroes; it is interwoven with his songs and poems. Wherever he roams a sight of it brings to his mind vivid recollections of his native hills. Wilfrid Campbell, the Canadian poet, has voiced this feeling in his lines to Burns:

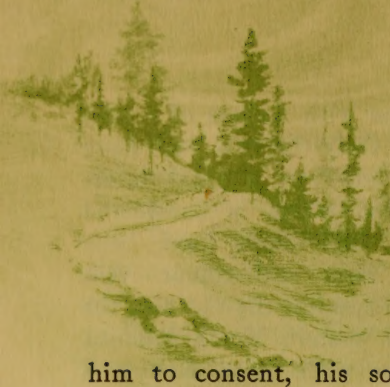
“Whose songs are first to heart and tongue
Wherever Scotsmen greet together,
And far-out alien scenes among,
Go mad at the glint of a sprig of heather.”

An old tradition says that the Picts long ago possessed the secret of making a wonderful liquor from the flowers of the heather. According to Robert Louis Stevenson it possessed remarkable powers:

“From the bonny bells of heather
They brewed a drink long syne,
Was sweeter far than honey,
Was stronger far than wine,
They brewed it and they drank it
And lay in a blessed swoon
For days and days together
In the dwellings underground.”

The secret of this wonderful “Heather Ale”, however, perished with the extermination of the Picts. Leydon, who





relates the story, says that after the slaughter a father and son alone remained. They were brought before Kenneth the Conqueror, who informed the father that his life would be spared if he would reveal the secret of making the famous liquor. This, however, the old Pict refused to do. To induce

him to consent, his son was put to death before his eyes. This exercise of cruelty only hardened the old man in his resolution and he said: 'Your threats might have influenced my son, but you have put him to death and they will now have no effect upon me'. The Conqueror spared the life of the old Pict in the hope that later he might be induced to divulge the secret; but he carried it with him to his grave.

The Highlanders of Scotland as well as other mountaineers of Europe know how to make a very luxurious bed by placing on the ground a quantity of cut heath with the flowers uppermost in the same manner as a Canadian arranges a bed of balsam boughs. It was on such a bed that Bonnie Prince Charlie rested when a fugitive in the Highlands. For three weeks he lay in the Cave of Corragbroth, in the braes of Glenmoriston, where eight robbers had taken up their abode. Fierce and lawless as they were they protected the young Prince and had no thought of earning the £30,000 which had been placed upon his head.

"Here has he lurked and here
The heather has been his bed;
The wastes of the Islands knew
And the Highland hearts were true,
To the bonnie, the brave and the dear,
The royal, the hunted head."

On Simpson Pass

Simpson Pass where the Canadian Heather blooms so profusely is a delightful area in the Rocky Mountains. The distribution of its woods, shrubbery, trees, ponds, streams and moss-covered boulders is so harmonious that it produces the impression of an artificial park and this appearance is heightened by the great masses of wild flowers which form veritable flower gardens.

As soon as the snow melts from such alpine meadows, the flowers spring up and so closely do they follow the snow line that

it is possible to stand one foot in snow, the other on living flowers. The most beautiful among the early flowers are the snow lily, the anemone, the spring beauty, the globe-flower, the snow-buttercup and the white marsh marigolds, which spring up in thousands and cover large areas. It is interesting to follow the procession of flowers up the mountain slopes and to find the same species which bloomed in April or May in the lower valleys just opening in August in the higher altitudes. It is still more interesting to observe that many species which grow in the valley are not to be found near the mountain tops, but are replaced there by plants very closely related, and to observe also that some species, for example the Mountain Heather, are not to be found in the lower valleys and have no very close relations there.

During its blooming period (July and August) the Red Mountain Heather presents an exceedingly beautiful appearance. The plants are not more than a foot high with bright green, narrow, heath-like leaves. The flowers which are of a deep rose-red colour gradually change to a rose-pink and when nearly mature an additional beauty is added to them by the delicate bright green of the young shoots. Mrs. Julia Henshaw thus describes them in her "Mountain Wild Flowers of Canada": "The *Bryanthus empetrifomis* grows abundantly in the mountains and at very high altitudes. It is a wonderful sight to see acre upon acre covered with its beautiful bells, until the slopes of the hills and the alpine meadows seem to be literally clothed with a glorious robe of rose-red heather".

The Canadian National Parks

"She paints with white and red the moors

To draw the nations out-of-doors"

(Emersons "Nature")

This sprig of heather comes to call to your attention Canada's National Parks, which have been set aside primarily to ensure to Canadians for all time those opportunities for recreation in the out-of-doors which humanity is more and more recognizing as vital to its well-being.

It is just possible that you may not know that Canada is rich in national parks and yet these parks are your parks and all the

wealth of beauty and opportunity for enjoyment which they offer are yours by right of heritage because you are a Canadian.

National Parks exist for the people. They are the people's share of the natural beauty of mountain, lake and stream.

A Distinction

The name park appears to create some confusion in the public mind in regard to National Parks. National Parks are to the life of the nation what city parks are to the life of the city. The city park is a breathing space which the public demand as a necessity for their well-being, but for the most part it is artificial in appearance and small in area. The national park, on the other hand, is huge in area and in reality is a wilderness in its natural state. A city breathing spot can in a small way provide refreshment of mind and body, but adequate relaxation and recuperation is realized only from the influence of Nature—the Nature of the wilderness.

Commercial Side of Parks

In the words of the Statute under which the Parks are administered, they are: "for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment" of the people. These purposes they achieve not only by providing for the people of Canada for all time, unequalled means of recreation in the out-of-doors under the best possible conditions, but by producing for the country an ever increasing revenue from tourist traffic and tourist traffic is one of the largest and most satisfactory means of revenue a nation can have. The tourist leaves large sums of money in the country he visits, but takes away with him in return for it nothing which makes the nation poorer. He goes away with probably improved health, certainly with a recollection of enjoyment of unequalled wonders of mountain, forest, stream and sky, of vitalizing ozone and stimulating companionship with Nature; but of the natural wealth of the country he takes nothing.


Since travel has become so well nigh universal, extraordinary scenery has become a national asset. The commercial potentialities of tourist traffic are startling. It is estimated that Switzerland's annual revenue from tourists is 150 million

dollars, that of France 600 millions; little Italy's, 100 millions. It is claimed that Americans spend each year \$500,000,000 in travel abroad. The pine woods of Maine are estimated to bring a revenue of \$40,000,000 each year on account of the visitors they attract and it is said that the orange blossoms of Florida are worth more to her than all the products of her soil. National Parks are one of the best means of attracting this tourist traffic and every dollar therefore which is spent on National Parks may be considered an investment on capital account which is likely to bring in a very satisfactory return upon the money invested. It is the consideration of these facts which has led a great many people in the United States to recommend the establishment of a Parks' Bureau and the development of a strong Parks' policy as "a solid business proposition".

Main Purpose Served.

After all is said and done, however, the commercial side of Parks, important as it may be, is only an incident in so far as Canada's Parks are concerned. Theodore Roosevelt, in an address at the first Conservation Congress at Washington, said: "Finally, let us remember that the conservation of our national resources, though the gravest problem of to-day, is yet but part of another and greater problem to which this nation is not yet awake, but to which it will awake in time and with which it must grapple if it is to live—the problem of national efficiency, the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation".

The Hon. Clifford Sifton, in a speech to the Conservation Commission, said: "With respect to the general progress of conservation ideas, it must be remembered that in the last resort, the highest degree of conservation depends upon the *efficiency of the human unit*". "The conservation of man is one of the main purposes of Government", similarly writes a prominent American conservationist. It may be a new doctrine, but there is no doubt that it is a true one. The most powerful armaments and the richest trade balance are nothing as compared with the vitality of the race. People are beginning to realize that it is time they took into consideration how best this vitality, upon which effi-



ciency rests, can be conserved. Canadians are fortunate in possessing a rich heritage of vitality bequeathed to them by the stalwart, virile, work-a-day men who were the pioneers of this country. Modern life, however, grows more and more complex with an increasing strain upon the vitality, particularly in our crowded cities. Recent statistics show a steady increase in urban and a decrease in rural population. Life in crowded cities does not make for health and vigour and each year city people of every class in increasing numbers find it necessary to seek rest and recreation and for the great majority there is no recreation which so truly re-creates and re-vitalizes as that which is found where fresh air, sunshine and beautiful natural scenery are combined. These mean an uplifting of the spirit, a renewal of bodily strength and activity of mind. "Humanity, like the giant Antæus, renews its strength when it touches mother earth".

The spirit of the National Parks ideal cannot be more effectively crystallized than by the following extract from John Muir, known throughout the continent as the lover of the mountain, the wilderness and all nature:

"The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. Awakening from the stupefying effects of over-industry, and the deadly apathy of luxury, they are trying as best they can to mix and enrich their little ongoings with those of Nature and to get rid of rust and disease."

Refining Influence

But the Parks not only serve to re-inforce life, they also tend to refine and elevate it. It has been said that no high civilization is possible where the national life does not allow of leisure and opportunity for the enjoyment of the beauties of nature and art. Our national parks with their wealth of natural beauty stimulate a love of nature and the love of nature is one of the purest of pleasures and one of the most universal. It has an influence akin to

that of the fine arts, but it demands no training for the enjoyment. Whenever the pleasures which involve cheap excitement become the recreation of a people the national character is lowered. "Education gained from the Parks" says Chas. Mulford Robinson, "is that which makes for broader public sympathies and wider interests, for finer appreciation of the good things of life". "Here," says a distinguished Canadian, coming back to the mountains after several years in the crowded cities of the east, "are purity, serenity and measureless peace. Here one may think high thoughts."

Patriotic Influence.

The love of nature is, moreover, closely allied to patriotism. It is the little country lanes of England with their blossoming hedgerows and the quiet fields, the braes and burns of Scotland and the heather on the hills that make the British exile long for home. Mr. Horace McFarland, President of the American Civic Federation, in an address upon the subject, "Are National Parks Worth while?" says:

"Consider what it is inspires us as we sing the National Hymn. Is it our wonder of mining showing in the hideous ore dumps of the sordid mining village. Is it in the burned over waste that has followed the cutting of much of our forest wealth. Is it in the power-house in which is harnessed the beauty of Niagara. Is it the smoking factory chimneys, the malodorous wharves along our navigable rivers. Is it even the lofty metropolitan sky scraper, or the great transcontinental steel highway?

"No, not one of these produces patriotism. Listen to the most sordid materialist who is American in birth or residence, as he boasts; it is always of the beauty of his town, his State, his country. Our devotion to the flag begins in that love of country which its beauty has begotten; it may end at last in the beauty of soul that makes the patriot ready to die for his country in battle—if just battle there may ever again be. So I hold that in stimulating and safeguarding the essential virtue of patriotism, the beauty of the American park stands forth as most of all worth while".

Policy and Ideals

The ideal on which Parks administration is being developed is that there is a distinct and ever-increasing necessity on the part of the people for the service which Parks can render and this necessity must at all times be provided for and therefore govern in the matter of the establishment of new park areas. To meet the needs of the people it is considered four distinct classes of parks are required. These are scenic parks, historic parks, animal parks and parks located specially to provide for the congested centres of population.

There are now in Canada six scenic parks: the Rocky Mountains Park, popularly known as the Banff Park, on the eastern slope of the Rockies, Yoho Park in British Columbia, adjoining it on the western slope with Field as centre and Glacier Park at the summit of the Selkirks—these three traversed by the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway; Jasper Park in the wonderful district recently opened up by the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway through the Yellowhead Pass; Waterton Lake Park, in Southern Alberta, a small reservation which is a favorite resort for campers and fishermen—and the St. Lawrence Islands Park, which comprises twelve reservations among the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence river.

The scenic park serves to preserve for all the people freedom of access to those areas characterized by outstanding scenic beauty. Unless reserved for the public, sooner or later, as this country becomes, like Europe, overcrowded, it will be found that the beauty and solitude of nature have become snatched from the people by private individuals. Ambassador Bryce in an address on parks recently emphasized the point that the quantity of natural beauty in the world is limited and cannot be increased. The following extract from his speech points a moral for Canada:

“We, in England and Scotland have lost some of the finest scenery we possess, because it has been taken into private estates. A great deal of the finest scenery in Scotland is now unapproachable by the pedestrian, or artist or naturalist because people have appropriated it to their private purposes and keep the public out”.


Most of Canada's grandest scenery is still part of the public domain. The problem to-day is how much of this should be reserved now in order to provide adequately not only for Canadians of to-day, but for the succeeding generations. In this connection another extract from a speech delivered by Ambassador Bryce before the Canadian Club of Ottawa, is significant:

"I know" he said, "that you have been doing that in Canada (establishing national parks) and I hope that if you need any further encouragement to do it, you will find it in the example of the Australians, and that you too will set apart more and more of those magnificent areas of scenery which you possess in the Rocky Mountains for the enjoyment of the people, looking forward to a day when the population of Canada will be tenfold what it is now and when the value of places where the pleasures of nature can be cultivated and where the wild animals can be preserved, and where the charm of solitude can be enjoyed—when the value of all these things will be even greater than it is at this moment."

Animal Parks

There are also two animal parks—Buffalo Park, at Wainwright, and Elk Island Park, at Lamont, Alberta. These are fenced enclosures for the protection of buffalo, moose, elk and deer and other wild animals. The former was established as a home for the Pablo herd of buffalo, purchased by the Government in 1907 from Michel Pablo, of Montana. This herd is now by far the largest herd of pure blood bison in the world, having increased to about 1450, or more than twice the original number procured.

The animal park is the natural complement of the other parks—it exists to serve the animal life of the country as the other parks serve human life. All the Dominion parks are game preserves and therefore help to protect our fast disappearing wild life; but certain parks are set aside whose first purpose is the preservation of native animals. They are primarily for the preservation of those classes of native wild life which, were these preserves not established, would very soon become extinct. In addition to the animal parks, bird-breeding sanctuaries are being established on available Dominion Lands throughout the West. And, having in mind the fact that it is estimated Canadian producers sustain a



loss each year of \$80,000,000 from insect life consequent upon the slaughter of insectivorous birds, the Animal Division of the Dominion Parks organization is taking steps to co-operate with the Provinces with a view to the preservation of bird life in general. There are worthy aesthetic and sentimental reasons

for action to prevent this continent becoming—what so great an authority as Professor Hornaday of the New York Biological Society says it is becoming—a gameless continent. But in addition there are strong economic reasons for protecting wild life and the Parks organization is working with this object in view.

Historic Parks

The historic park constitutes a line of development as yet in a formative state.

The aim of the historic park is the perpetuation of memorials of events and places of historic importance. From one end of Canada to the other there are historic places and historic remains. Parks established at these points, while incidentally providing the recreation of the out-of-doors so essentially a feature of National Parks work, have, however, a further reason for their existence, viz.—to educate Canadians young and old in the history of their country and stimulate that patriotism which a knowledge of our country is bound to develop. Throughout Canada there are points where events have transpired of the utmost significance in Canada's history. Some of them are battlefields; but peace has her victories as well as war and many of the important historic points are important for other reasons than war. For instance the United Empire Loyalists first landed in Ontario at Adolphustown on the Bay of Quinte. Americans glorify the landing place of the Pilgrim Fathers. To Ontario and to Canada Adolphustown should be as significant as Plymouth Rock is to the United States.

Canada's history teems with events that cannot fail to arouse pride and enthusiasm in succeeding generations. Book history never can fire the imagination like physical object lessons. No Canadian wants the scenes of famous victories—of peace or of war—incorporated within the grounds of some private owner. Landmarks like these are as much the property of Canadians by

virtue of inheritance as is the history of which they are memorials. Landmarks like these set aside as National Parks cannot fail to strengthen the respect and love and devotion of all Canadians to their country and its institutions.

For City Dwellers

Another line of development in connection with National parks, like the historic park, is also in a formative state, viz., parks calculated to meet the needs of the congested centres of population—their needs for facilities for recreation close to nature—recreation in the wilderness. However attractive and useful parks in the Rocky Mountains may be for people who can reach them, it is obvious that geography makes them a forbidden land for many who need their aid most. If national parks can render the important service to Canadians of the present and Canadians of the future which the best thought of the world considers they can render, the inevitable conclusion appears to be that national parks should be brought within easy access of all the large centres of population. For instance, a national park near Montreal, or Toronto, or Winnipeg, or Vancouver, or St. John, or Halifax, would provide a place where the poor of that city could get a summer cottage site (as they now do in Banff, Rocky Mountains Park) for a merely nominal rental, where the children of the poor could be provided with outings, where boys and men could camp and fish and study nature, where the sick and delicate could find new stores of health in the great out-of-doors—where all this could be done by right of citizenship without leave or hindrance of anyone; where there would be a tract of wood and stream and mountain forever safe from the aggrandizement of private greed; where all Canadians might—with the substitution of the word “Canadian” for “American”—adapt to themselves the words of California John in the “Rules of the Game”: “I always did like these here mountains and the big trees—and the rocks and the water and the snow. Everywhere else the country belongs to someone; it’s staked out. Up here it belongs to me because I am a Canadian”.

Meaning of National Parks Movement

To sum up, then, Dominion Parks constitute a movement that means millions of dollars of revenue annually for the people of Canada; that means the preservation for their benefit, advantage and enjoyment forever, of that natural heritage of beauty whether it be in the form of majestic mountain, peaceful valley, gleaming glacier or crystalline lake, which is men's rightful heritage; that means the guarantee to the people of Canada to-day and all succeeding generations of Canadians of those means of recreation which serve best to make better men and women, physically, morally and mentally; the protection of the country's beauty spots equally for the poor and the rich; the preservation of those places which stand for historic events that have been milestones in Canada's development—in short they represent a movement calculated to promote and maintain an efficiency and predominancy among Canadians which Canada's history and Canada's potentialities justify. Canada's Parks exist to render the best possible service to Canada and Canadians. Their establishment and development are based upon the idea that Canada's greatness as a nation depends not so much upon her natural resources of soil, or minerals, or of timber as upon the quality of her men and women.



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